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## BOOK REVIEWS

### PILLAR OF FIRE

by

KARL STERN

New York      Harcourt, Brace & Co.      1951      302 pp.

In this book, **The Pillar of Fire**, we are given a moving account of the life of Karl Stern as depicted in his own attractively casual manner of writing. He was brought up in an era in which the intellectuals were influenced by the dialectical materialism of Marx and Hegel and of these philosophies he was a most ardent disciple.

Karl Stern was born, and lived the greater part of his life, in Bavaria. He was born of middle class Jewish parents and in this book he vividly depicts his earliest memories of his mother, father and grandfather. After his early education he travelled to a nearby town to continue his studies. It was there that he was first influenced by the Orthodox Jewish faith and its rigid forms of asceticism. He accepted these strict practices but later, influenced by his parents and his friends, he dropped them. He continued his education in medical school and studied in Munich, Berlin and Frankfurt, specializing in neurology. During these years he was subjected to many philosophies and he became convinced that the dialectical materialism of Marx was the solution to the problems of his day. He now accepted a post in the German Research Institute for Psychiatry in Munich and he remained there until he was forced to leave the country by the increasing hostile attitude of the Nazis against the Jews.

During the next period of his life he began to wonder concerning the Catholic religion and the implications it would have if Jesus, the Jew, really was the promised Messiah. His Catholic friends had a pronounced influence on him but yet the clouds of doubt blanketed and surrounded his soul like an immovable barrier. Yet he was a Jew and thought like a Jew; to accept Christ would mean losing his nationality. To put it in the author's words, "By some my-



sterious twist of fate the Jews are the only people who cannot remain a people and be Christians at the same time". When he discovered Judaism he had become immensely proud of his spiritual heritage, and this he would have to reject to accept Christ as the Messiah. This book is the story of a conversion but particularly the story of one who became a Catholic almost against his will.

In his confused state of mind, depressed with his materialistic spirit, he read St. Thomas' teaching on hope. Hope to him until then had only been a natural virtue. St. Thomas pointed out the supernatural aspect of hope and it opened to Karl, through a little gap, a gaze into a lofty Christian anthropology.

In Dr. Stern's book, Christians will find a better understanding of the Jewish faith and ritual from which the Christian faith derives. For Jews the book will provide an answer to their most pointed questions. Christ Himself said, "I come not to destroy the law of the prophets but to fulfill it." This idea Karl Stern slowly grasped and in it he found the guiding light to a more perfect law, the law of love which Christ gave to all peoples by his passion and death on the cross. The very fact that Christ was the Messiah completely changed his life and lifted him from the abyss of nihilism to the lofty pinnacle of faith from which all things took a new meaning and a new significance.

The author presents a penetrating analysis of the diverse philosophies and ideologies of our time. After believing these and discarding them, the question is no longer, "How can you, with your scientific training, accept the doctrine of the Church?" The question is rather: "How can you, who see how science is being used to construct a world which is no longer Christocentric, if you are deeply aware of the urgency to reintegrate the wealth produced by modern science into a Christian cosmology, how can you not become a Christian?"

Karl Stern points out that science and religion are compatible. He shows that a scientific attitude of mind is not an obstacle to faith but that a true realization of science should lead man closer to his Creator.

To you, my readers, I recommend this book written in a fascinating, familiar style. In very logical order the author takes us on an interesting journey, the journey of his life, the journey of a convert who has finally reached a haven of rest, the peace and joy of a tranquil conscience.

—REGIS DUFFY, '53.



**GOD GOES TO MURDERERS' ROW**

by

FATHER M. RAYMOND, O.C.S.O.

New York      Bruce Publishing Co.      1951      211 pp.

Of the countless conversions to the Church down through the centuries, one of the most notable ones was the acceptance into the fold by Christ on Calvary of a murderer and thief who was crucified with Him. Father Raymond, the well known Trappist of Gethsemani Abbey, has written an extended account of a similar miracle of divine grace. Tom Penney, a doomed criminal and a modern St. Dismas, found Our Saviour indirectly in the solitude of a prison, through God's human agents.

At the early age of fifteen years, Tom Penney was found guilty of grand larceny and served two years in a reform school. Soon after his release he was sentenced to serve twenty years imprisonment for wounding two men in a hold-up. He was released after seven years and, with the long years of confinement failing to have its desired effect, he returned to his former habits. The climax of his career of crime came on September 28, 1941. The brutal murder of Marion Miley, noted golfer, and her mother at a country club in Lexington, Kentucky, was committed by Penney and his two associates in what had been planned as merely a routine robbery. The search for the killers, their eventual capture and the subsequent series of confusing court trials puzzled the police, newsmen and the public for many months. The men were tried and convicted. On February 26, 1943, Tom Penney and his two accomplices were electrocuted.

Behind these reported facts, however, lies the story; a story that was filled with more mystery and suspense than the surface tale of crime and punishment that reached the headlines; a story of a hardened criminal expressing deep sorrow for his mis-spent life and a willingness to make amends; a story of the Hound of Heaven stalking the death house in pursuit of another soul;—a good story—a story that is well worth reading.

Through his contact with a Catholic chief of police, two nuns who had heard about him and adopted him as their favorite object of prayer and especially a certain Fa-



ther George Donnelly, Penney was moved to enter the Church. From that moment religion became the absorbing passion of this former gangster. Of this fact there is ample evidence. From the two hundred and twenty one of his letters written during his confinement and the statements of those who were with him at the county jail and in the state penitentiary at Eddyville, one could perhaps imagine the reason for the transformation of a man who changed in the silence and solitude of a prison cell from a hardened criminal into one who so longed for the Face of God. Some of his religious sentiments seem more like those of a man living in a cloister rather than those of a condemned criminal and the author portrays masterfully how the "crooked" lines which God wrote in his life led straight onto the path of love.

Life is not without its trials and temptations, however, and the dramatic incident that took place shortly before Tom Penney was to die nearly endangered the self-direction in spiritual matters that had been practically forced upon him by circumstances. It was, fortunately, a mistake more of the heart than of the mind and easily corrected, thereby preventing a grave miscarriage of justice.

**God Goes To Murderer's Row** will be a source of inspiration and encouragement even for those who do not expect to end their life in the same manner as Tom Penney. Father Raymond, in an interesting manner, unravels the mystery which surrounded the actual murder case and supplies the background and dialogue for the events. It is a book deserving of a wide circulation, proving the truth of the proverb, "God can write straight even with crooked lines."

—Allan MacDonald '54.

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The world's a stage on which all parts are played.

—Thomas Middleton.

A little philosophy inclineth man's mind to atheism, but depth in philosophy bringeth men's mind about to religion.

—Francis Bacon.